



KNOW YOUR FRUITS AND VEGGIES



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Cantaloupe Offers More than Sweet Juicy Refreshment



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Some say cantaloupe and some say muskmelon. Whatever you call this pungent, juicy fruit, the fact is this is one healthy food! Cantaloupe is the perfect snack for adults and kids, and adding this fruit to your diet has definite benefits, besides just being tasty.

What is it?

Cantaloupe is part of the melon family which includes squash, cucumber, gourds, and pumpkin. In America, we know cantaloupe by its rib-textured outer skin. When you slice a cantaloupe in half, you'll find a pocket of seeds and soft threads. Scoop this out and you'll be ready to enjoy the sweet, juicy orange color flesh with its distinctive flavor and aroma.

Grown on vines, this fruit is ripe when the stem begins to separate easily from the cantaloupe itself. Because the aroma of the cantaloupe is so distinctive, many people say it is quite simple to tell if the fruit is ripe. If it smells ripe, it is ripe.

History

Christopher Columbus is credited with introducing cantaloupes to America during his second voyage to the continent in the late 15th Century. This North American cantaloupe with its familiar orange flesh is the variety we are most familiar with in America. This differs from the European cantaloupe, which has an outer rind of a gray-green color and is smooth instead of ribbed.

Long before North America was introduced to cantaloupe, Africans, Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks grew the fruit in their native lands. The varieties differed just as much as the regions, but it was all cantaloupe.

Health Benefits

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Like many healthy fruits, cantaloupes are rich in vitamin C and contain antioxidants that help promote good cardiovascular health and better immunity. Cantaloupe also contains beta-carotene, a rich source of vitamin A which reduces the risk of cataracts and promotes eye health.

These vitamins also help limit the damage caused by free-radicals. We can't forget about the cantaloupe's healthy dose of B-complex vitamins which are known to help regulate blood sugar levels by processing carbs slowly, over a longer period of time.

Fun Facts

The name "cantaloupe" is derived from an Italian village called Cantalup, which was among the first places where the fruit was cultivated around the year 1700. However, this is known by a few other names in different parts of the world.

Persians and Armenians know this fruit as part of a group of muskmelons that include honeydew, casaba, and crenshaw varieties. South Africans refer to them as spanspeks. Australians call cantaloupe rockmelons.

How to Eat

Most people enjoy fresh cantaloupe raw, on its own, savoring the juicy, rich texture and flavor as a snack or dessert. However, because cantaloupe is so flavorful and appealing, many find it a fun food to experiment with in order to serve in new ways. One interesting serving suggestion is to wrap cantaloupe chunks in thinly cut prosciutto slices for a tasty and eye-pleasing appetizer.

Cantaloupe also goes well with yogurt and mixed with other fruits in sweet salads. You can even make a cold soup by blending other fruits like apples, peaches, and strawberries with cantaloupe together in a cold puree. Cantaloupe also makes a great sweet bread with just the right spices, nuts, and spices like ginger and cinnamon. Slushies and smoothies are another popular way to serve this tantalizing fruit.

Something to keep in mind is that cantaloupes have a short lifespan. Since the surface of the outer rind is so rough, it can harbor bacteria, particularly Salmonella. For this reason, it is important to wash cantaloupes well before cutting them open. Try to eat your cantaloupe within three days of purchase to reduce this bacterial risk.

The unmistakably sweet taste of ripe cantaloupe make this one fruit that is easy to enjoy. For those of us with a sense of culinary adventure, there's a world of interesting recipes waiting for you to explore with this popular seasonal fruit.

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Chard Packs a Nutritious Punch In A Colorful Package



Image: [salsachica/sxc.hu](#)

You may know chard by a number of different names, like swiss chard, spinach beet, mangold, or silverbeet. But no matter what you call it, chard is a delicious and very nutritious green. It has a wealth of nutrients and over a dozen antioxidants, making it one of the best leafy vegetables for healthy diets.

What is it?

Chard is a cousin of the beet. However, only the stalks and leaves of chard are edible, even though, like beets, they have a bulb that grows beneath the surface of the ground.

The green leaves are saturated with a deep red and white tint. The stalks of the chard plant can range in color between orange, white, red, and yellow. A variety of chard can sometimes be found packaged together as rainbow chard.

History

Ancient Greeks and Romans used chard for medicinal purposes as early as the fourth century B.C. It is native to the Mediterranean region, found mostly in Italy, France, and Spain, but is now also grown in America.

The word Swiss was added to the word chard by 19th century seed catalogs to help distinguish this vegetable from the French spinach varieties.

Health Benefits

Chard is considered one of the world's healthiest vegetables for several reasons. It has at least thirteen known antioxidants, including syringic acid, which helps regulate blood sugar

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levels, and kaempferol, known for its ability to benefit cardiovascular health. The stems and veins of the plant also have nutrients called betalains that help reduce inflammation and detoxify the body.

As if that's not enough, chard is an excellent source of vitamins K, A, and C, as well as a long list of nutrients that includes, calcium, iron, zinc, and phosphorus. Chard is also low in fat and cholesterol, and contains protein and dietary fiber. This very common green leafy vegetable is actually quite unique for its arsenal of healthy benefits.

Fun Facts

The word “chard” actually comes from the Latin word *carduus* which means thistle. As this “*carduus*” was being heavily cultivated in France, the word evolved into the French word “*carde*” which in English evolved into “chard.”

Another source indicates that the word “chard” was adopted by the French in order to distinguish it from a similar celery-like vegetable called cardoon. No matter what you call it, chard certainly has developed somewhat of an identity crisis.

How to Eat

Like many other leafy greens like kale and spinach, chard can be sautéed, grilled, roasted, or steamed as a side dish of its own or as an ingredient in casseroles mixed with rice, quinoa, or pasta. You can eat the younger plants raw, but it has somewhat of a bitter taste that may be too harsh-tasting for most people.

Lots of Mediterranean dishes feature chard as part of the recipe. If stored properly in the refrigerator, chard can last up to two weeks. One of the best ways to cook chard is to boil it in a similar way you would other greens, making a traditional Southern dish that has a long history in America. Another simple recipe is to saute quickly in a skillet and toss it with some lemon juice, olive oil, and garlic.

Vegetarians frequently use chard in recipes, and one healthy idea is to create a spicy vegetable tart pie using tofu, egg whites, mushrooms, and a crust made from various seeds and walnuts.

During the peak season for chard, stock up and try adding this green to soups, pasta, quiche and other baked vegetable and cheese dishes. The nutritional benefits are incredible and you'll be enjoying a time-honored member of the family of greens!

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Cherries Brighten the Table and Gladden the Heart



Image: [piotr_los/sxc.hu](#)

The song says “life is just a bowl of cherries.” If that's true, you can count me in! Cherries are one of the tastiest fruits you'll ever find, and one of the prettiest when placed in a bowl on a table. So, fill a bowl and check out what cherries have in store for your life.

What is it?

Cherries are part of the agricultural family that includes plums, apricots, and peaches. Like their cousins, cherries have a stone pit in the center, but because of their smaller size, these pits cause a bit more consternation. This has inspired many inventors to design mechanical cherry pitting tools.

You'll find cherries in the stores year-round, pitted and unpitted, canned and frozen, so you can enjoy eating them just about anytime in a number of savory and sweet recipes. Not only are cherries delicious and very snack-worthy, many people enjoy them for their health benefits as well. This little dynamo contains powerful antioxidants and healthy benefits for cardiovascular wellness.

History

Cherries have been cultivated since prehistoric times, making it one of the oldest known fruits in existence. Cherry trees are native to parts of Asia and Europe. However, Greek, Roman, and Egyptian civilizations knew the fruit, as well.

At least one species of cherry trees was well established in America by the time the colonists arrived. Today, four states contribute 90% of the world's cherry crop. Of the more than 1,000 varieties of cherry trees, only 10 are commercially produced for consumers.

Health Benefits

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Cherries are a great source of potassium and vitamin C, but their biggest benefit is from a specific antioxidant called anthocyanins, which also gives the fruit its rich red pigment. These anthocyanins have been shown to reduce pain and inflammation in scientific studies, which in turn reduces the risk for high cholesterol, heart disease, and excess belly fat.

Other research suggests that cherries ease painful symptoms of conditions such as gout and arthritis. One particular study by an Oregon university pointed to less muscle pain in runners who participated in a long-distance relay after consuming cherry juice for the week before the race. This is a tasty trial that I know many runners wouldn't object to participating in.

Fun Facts

One of the more expensive varieties of cherry is the Rainer cherry. The reason for this is because, in general, cherries are a favorite of birds. In the case of the Rainer cherry, the birds consume most of the season's harvest before they have a chance to be picked for commercial sale, thus creating a shortage which creates a higher price tag. Cherry trees also provide food for several species of caterpillars, so you can see that when a bowl of cherries graces our table, it's dodged a lot of obstacles to get there.

Cherry trees are classified as part of the rose family. As such, cherry leaves are poisonous, unlike the fruit itself. It takes about five years before a cherry tree matures enough for the first harvest. It's estimated that the average American household consumes about five pounds of cherries each year, and each cherry tree produces enough cherries to bake almost thirty pies.

How to Eat

Fresh cherries have a short shelf life of just four days in a refrigerator, so they must be consumed quickly or frozen as soon as possible. Freezing them quickly if not consumed fresh also retains the full benefit of the antioxidants and nutrients in the fruit. Like other highly-perishable fruit such as blueberries, cherries should not be washed until you're ready to eat them. The moisture that inevitably stays trapped in the packaging and on the fruit is bacteria's best friend.

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Cherries can be snacked on as is or used in any number of recipes for a tart, fresh flavor from nature. They make great additions to breakfast foods like cereal, oatmeal, pancakes, and yogurt. You can also find dried cherries, perfect for including in meat or green salads, or with a number of pasta and rice dishes.

If you buy concentrated cherry juice, you can create some exciting smoothies and spritzers for a mid-day treat or evening cooler. Of course the dessert possibilities for cherries are well known. You'll want to give cherries a try in pies, muffins, cakes, cookies, compotes, and much more. And who hasn't indulged in a chocolate covered cherry at some point in their life?

Cherries are another of the super-foods highly recommended by nutritionists for healthy benefits. A quick search for recipes will quickly introduce you to new ways to enjoy these old time favorites which have gained in popularity again. Life is just a bowl of cherries when you include these tart morsels in your meal plan.

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Coconut Cracks The Code For A Tasty Tropical Fruit



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Perhaps you have enjoyed shredded coconut through the years in cookies or other desserts. But, did you know this sweet treat can be enjoyed in so many other ways? Coconut is nutritious as well as delicious. Take a look at some of the delightful surprises this fruit, or nut if you wish, has for you.

What is it?

Coconuts are a member of the palm tree family, and grow in tropical climates closer to the equator, in both hemispheres of the world. They are cultivated in over 80 countries within these regions. Coconuts have several layers, and the exterior shell is a hard, fiber-like membrane that requires a sharp knife and a little work to crack.

This fruit is officially classified as a fibrous one-seeded drupe. Now, most people (unless you're a botanist) have never heard of a "drupe." A drupe is a fruit that has what we would call a "pit" which is nothing more than a hard cover that encloses the seed, like a peach or an olive. Drupes, including coconuts, have three layers which we must navigate through to enjoy what the coconut has to offer.

History

The origin of the coconut seems to be debated a bit. One palm specialist has suggested that the coconut most likely came from the Indian Archipelago or Polynesia, using one argument that there are more varieties of coconut palms in the Eastern hemisphere than in the Americas. Other scientists argue that the coconut origins can be traced to the Americas and migrated westward across the Pacific.

Portugal and Spain are the two countries that first documented seeing coconuts during the mid 16th century, describing them as resembling the faces of monkeys. Although most often associated with the Pacific islands and southern Asia in movies, art, and historical depictions, coconuts do grow in extreme southern areas of Florida, California, Hawaii, and the Caribbean.

Health Benefits

Coconut has been credited with everything from improving hair and skin quality to easing

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